



# ONCE UPON A TIME AT THE END OF THE WORLD™

JASON AARON   ALEXANDRE TEFENKGI   LEE LOUGHRIDGE  
WITH NICK DRAGOTTA AND RICO RENZI



#3

**BOOM!**  
STUDIOS





**BOOK ONE**

**LOVE IN THE  
WASTELAND**



**CHAPTER THREE**

**THE WAYS OF  
THE STRAYED**

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**COLORED BY.....LEE LOUGHRIDGE**

PAGES TWENTY-SIX THROUGH THIRTY

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MIKE DEL MUNDO  
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**WHATNOT EXCLUSIVE  
VARIANT COVER BY  
INGRID GALA**





Day after day,  
they walked.

Through forests  
of rot and fields  
of sour.

Across a melting  
bridge spanning  
a river of fire.

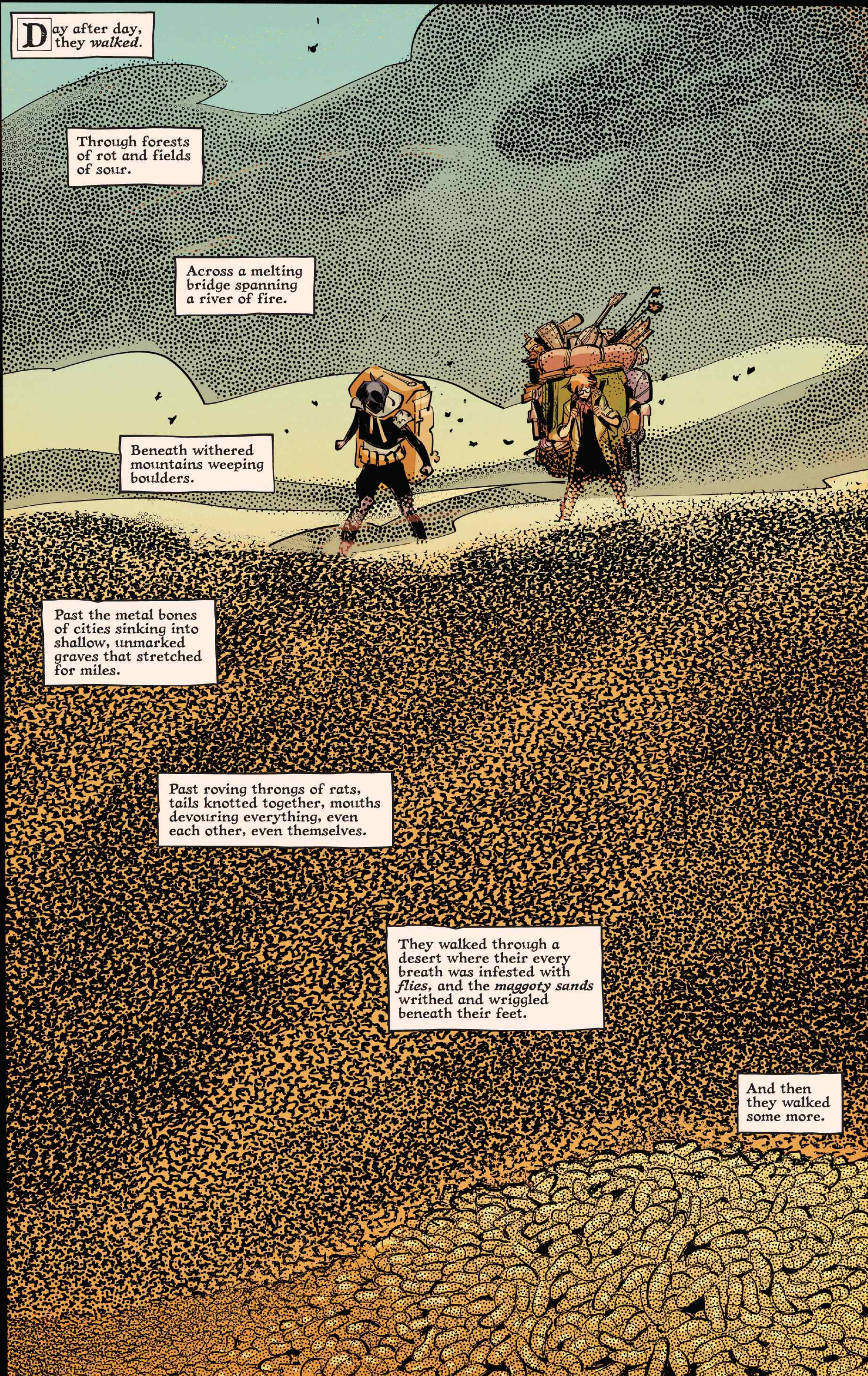
Beneath withered  
mountains weeping  
boulders.

Past the metal bones  
of cities sinking into  
shallow, unmarked  
graves that stretched  
for miles.

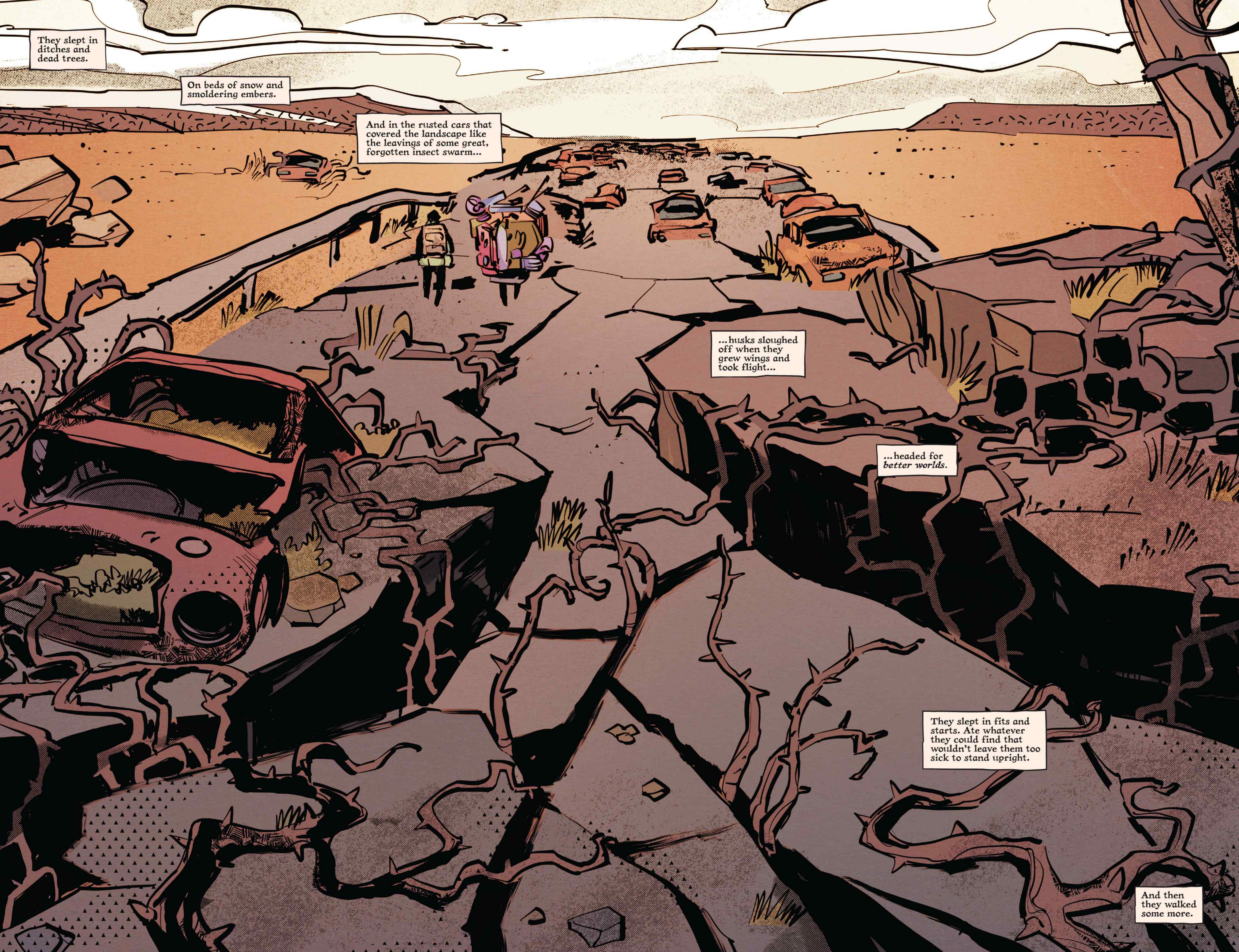
Past roving throngs of rats,  
tails knotted together, mouths  
devouring everything, even  
each other, even themselves.

They walked through a  
desert where their every  
breath was infested with  
*flies*, and the *maggoty sands*  
writhed and wriggled  
beneath their feet.

And then  
they walked  
some more.







They slept in  
ditches and  
dead trees.

On beds of snow and  
smoldering embers.

And in the rusted cars that  
covered the landscape like  
the leavings of some great,  
forgotten insect swarm...

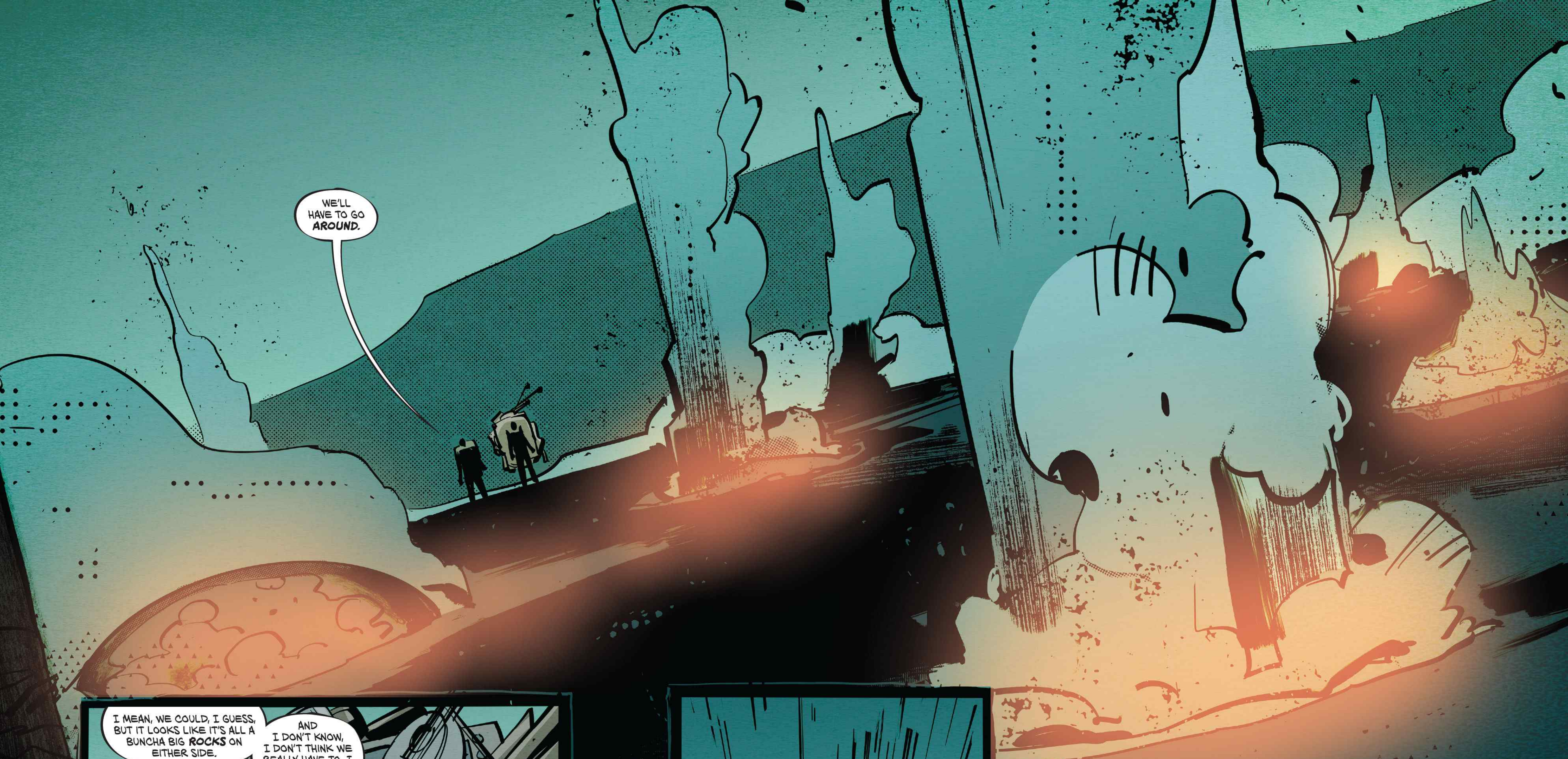
...husks sloughed  
off when they  
grew wings and  
took flight...

...headed for  
*better worlds.*

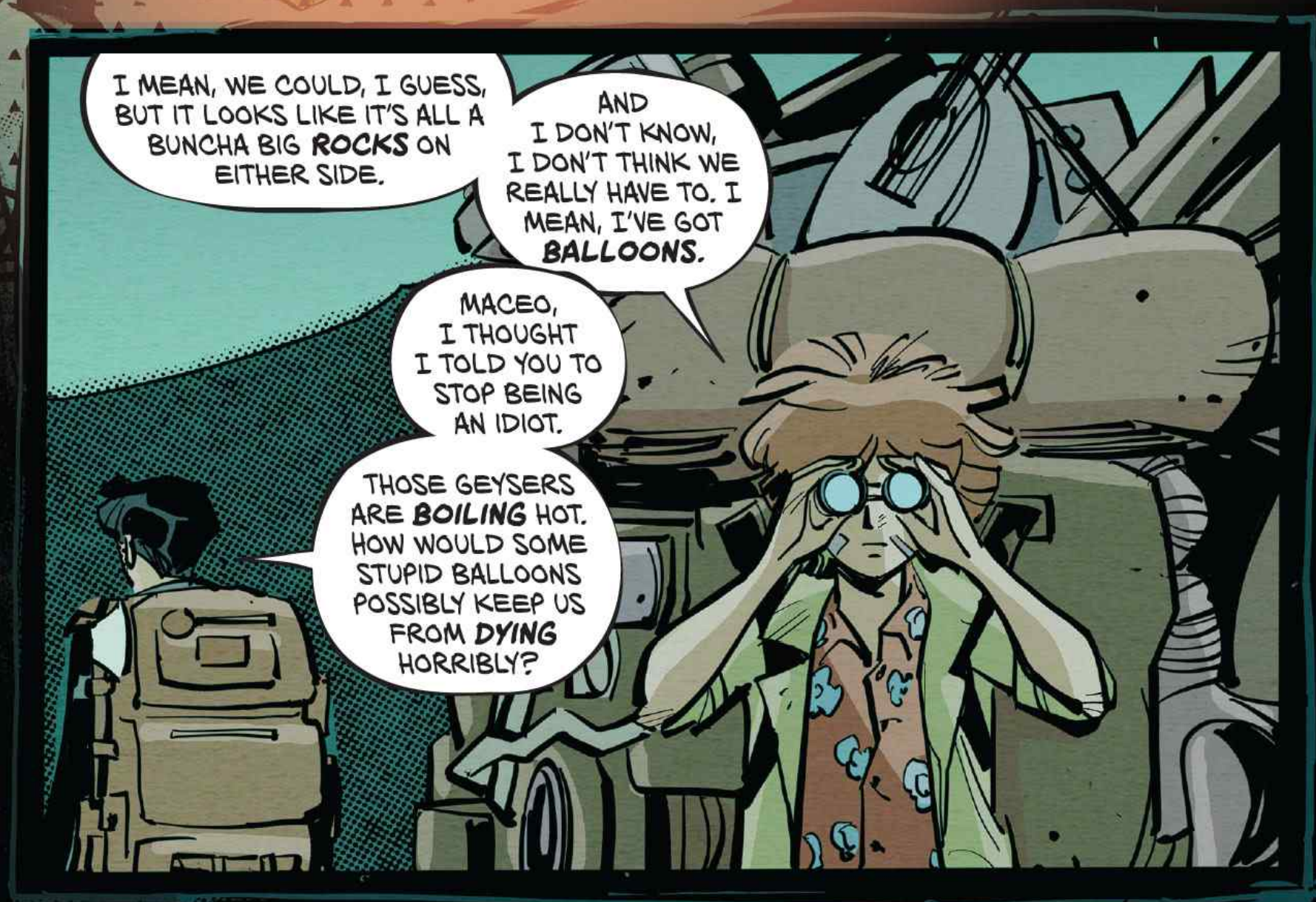
They slept in fits and  
starts. Ate whatever  
they could find that  
wouldn't leave them too  
sick to stand upright.

And then  
they walked  
some more.





WE'LL  
HAVE TO GO  
AROUND.



I MEAN, WE COULD, I GUESS,  
BUT IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S ALL A  
BUNCHA BIG **ROCKS** ON  
EITHER SIDE.

AND  
I DON'T KNOW,  
I DON'T THINK WE  
REALLY HAVE TO. I  
MEAN, I'VE GOT  
**BALLOONS**.

MACEO,  
I THOUGHT  
I TOLD YOU TO  
STOP BEING  
AN IDIOT.

THOSE GEYSERS  
ARE **BOILING** HOT.  
HOW WOULD SOME  
STUPID **BALLOONS**  
POSSIBLY KEEP US  
FROM **DYING**  
HORRIBLY?



HUH.  
I'LL BE  
DAMNED.



RIGHT?  
NOT BAD,  
RIGHT?

YEAH,  
MACEO. NOT  
BAD.

A lovely *stroll*  
on a rainy day.

That's how they  
would remember the  
place where the land  
vomited *hot death*.



In the *burnt plains* that went on and on, past the limits of sight and sanity...

...they watched video cassettes of cartoons.

On a *rat-powered* television.

It was the 17th time they had seen this particular cartoon together. But the one time they would never forget.

HEH.

HA HAA HA!

WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT?

THAT NOISE I JUST MADE?

SOMETHING'S FUCKING WRONG WITH ME!

YOU'RE OKAY, MEZZY. IT'S CALLED LAUGHING.

That night they lay their heads on lava rock. It was like bedding down on a billion jagged claws.

But Maceo slept with the biggest grin on the face of the planet.



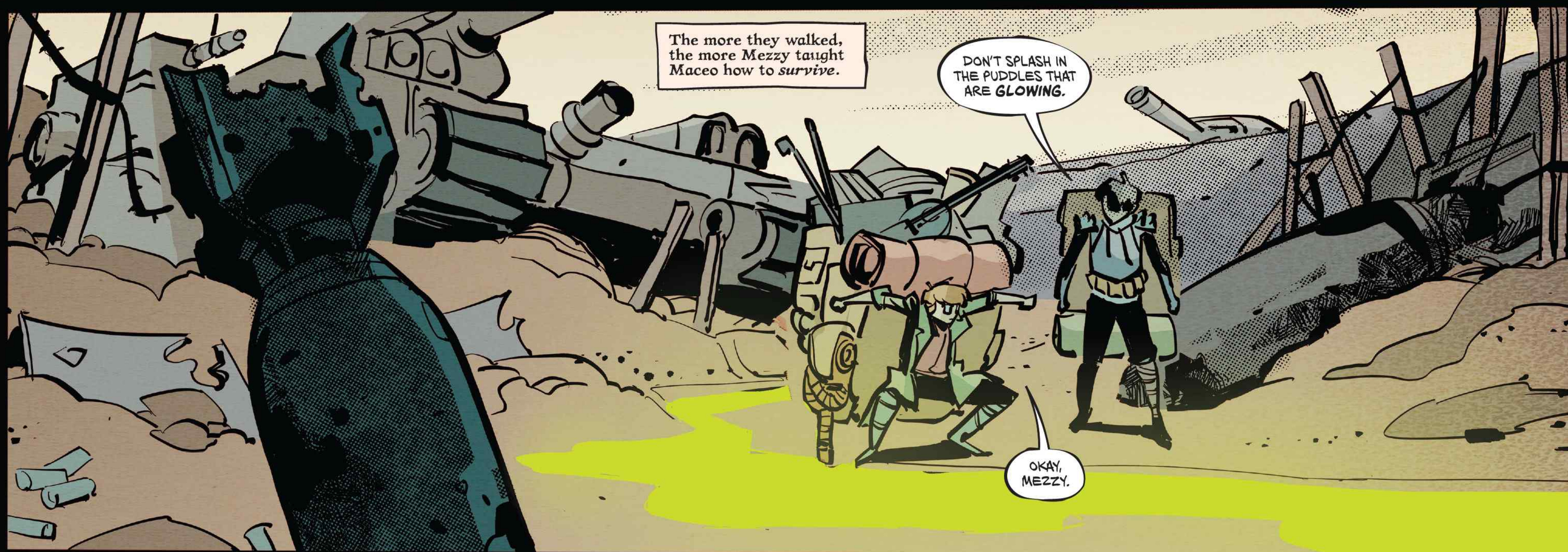
Inside a two-mile tunnel where the ceiling dripped blood (for reasons they did not linger long enough to decipher)...



...she taught him how to *listen* for holes, how to *smell* exposed fangs...how to see a single *tick* lurking in deepest shadow.



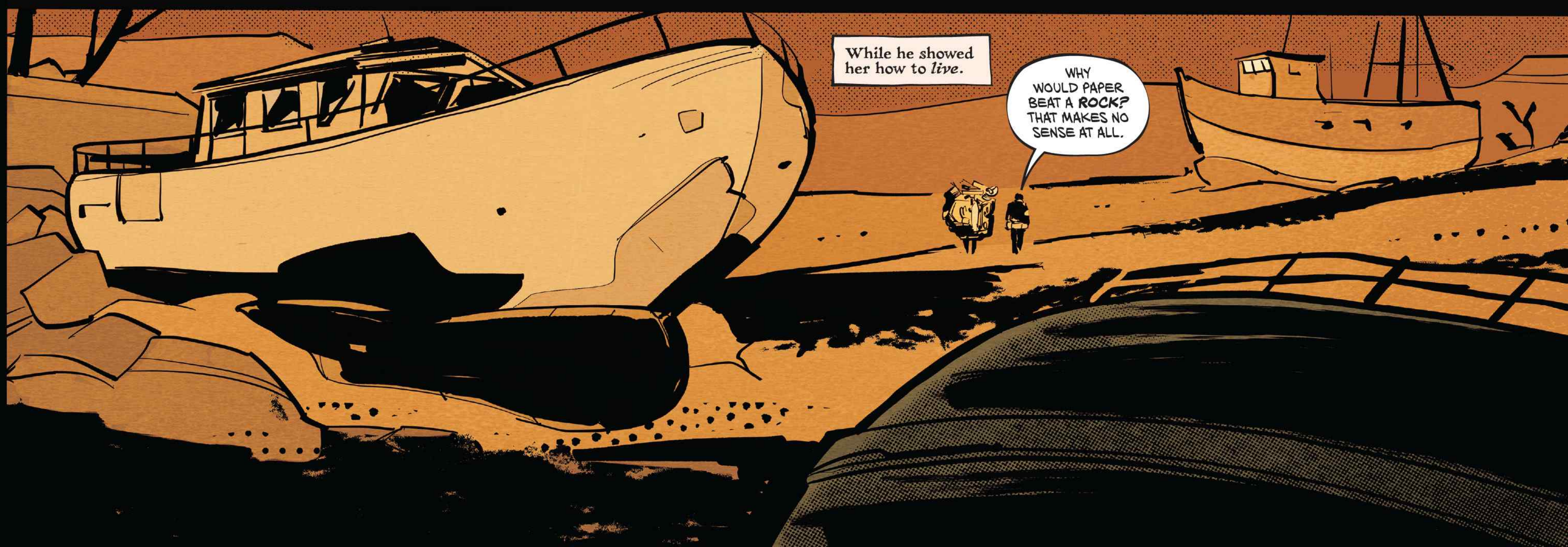
He showed her how to dance.



The more they walked, the more Mezzy taught Maceo how to *survive*.

DON'T SPLASH IN THE PUDDLES THAT ARE *GLOWING*.

OKAY, MEZZY.



While he showed her how to *live*.

WHY WOULD PAPER BEAT A *ROCK*? THAT MAKES NO SENSE AT ALL.





THOSE ARE THE RULES OF THE GAME. I'M NOT MAKING THEM UP.

RIGHT, WELL, NEXT TIME WE'RE ATTACKED BY STARVING RATS, YOU STAND YOUR GROUND WITH A PIECE OF FUCKING PAPER AND I'LL HAVE A ROCK, AND WE'LL SEE WHO GETS THEIR GUTS RIPPED OUT FIRST.

THERE AREN'T ANY RATS IN THIS GAME, MEZZY.

PROVERB 485 OF THE BOOK: "THERE ARE ALWAYS RATS."

"ALWAYS."

YOU MENTION THIS **BOOK** A LOT.

IS THAT SOMETHING THEY HAD WHERE YOU CAME FROM?



YES.



SO... WOULD YOU... MAYBE LIKE TO TALK ABOUT... WHY YOU LEFT?





I...

BECAUSE I THINK THAT TALKING ALWAYS HELPS, YOU KNOW?



I MEAN, EVEN WHEN IT COMES TO THE THINGS THAT ARE HARD TO TALK ABOUT.

YES, I--

ESPECIALLY WITH THOSE THINGS, I THINK.



I MEAN, WHENEVER I TALK ABOUT MY PARENTS, I FEEL LIKE I'M SWALLOWING FIRE ANTS. SO I GET IT IF YOU DON'T WANNA TALK ABOUT IT, BUT I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I'M HERE TO LISTEN IF--

MACEO. STOP TALKING.



WHERE I COME FROM...THEY TEACH YOU TO SURVIVE. AT ALL COSTS.

AND FOR ME TO SURVIVE... I NEEDED TO LEAVE.



MEZZY. JUST SO YOU KNOW...

I'M REALLY GLAD YOU LEFT.



YEAH. ME TOO.

They walked... heretofore unknown emotions swelling with each step...and for that moment it didn't matter where they were or what lay ahead.



For one blessed moment, it was as if they were the only people left in the whole wide world.

SO NOW CAN YOU TELL ME WHERE WE'RE GOING?

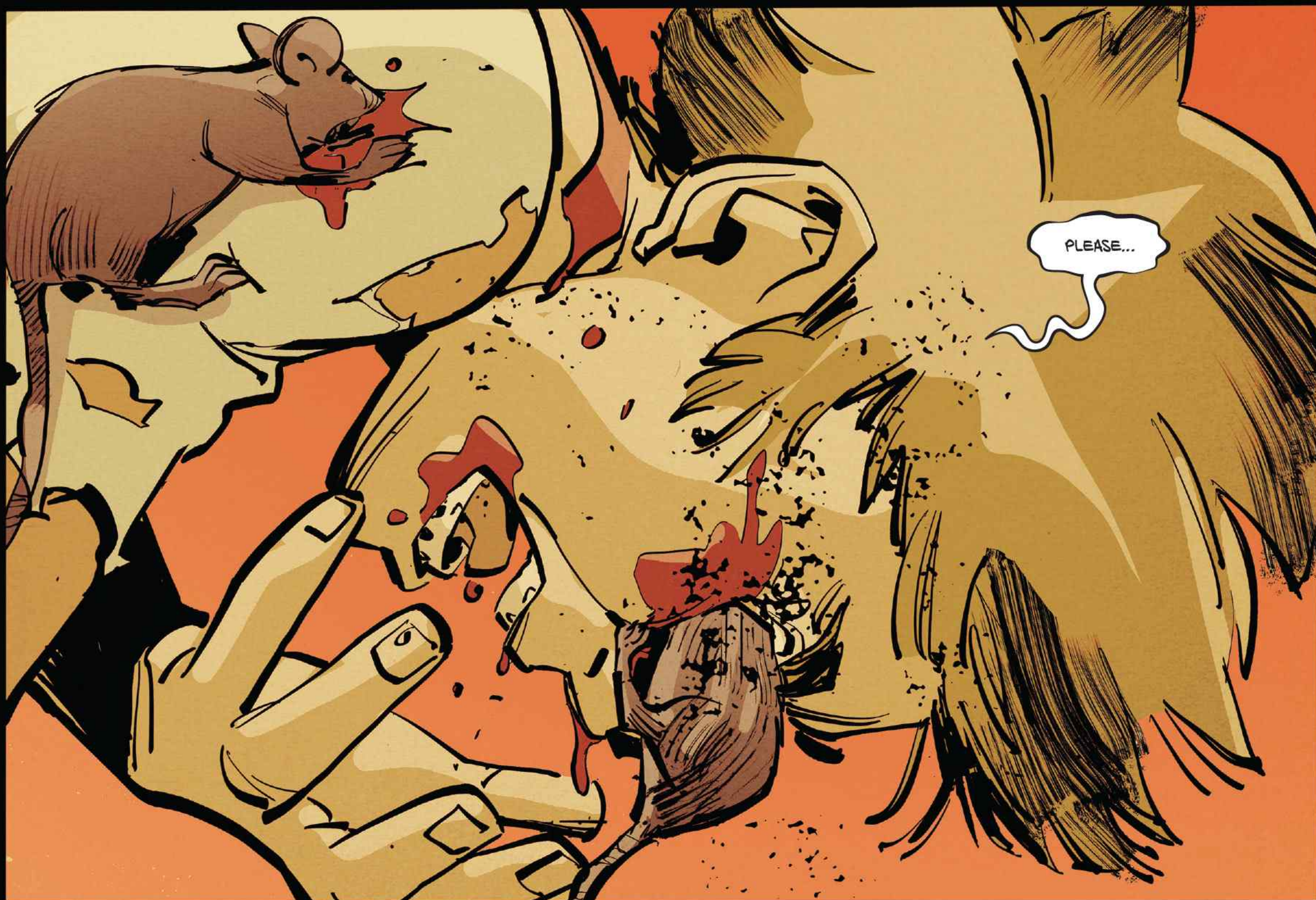
MACEO... DON'T FUCKING MOVE.





The moment quickly passed.

Never to return.



PLEASE...





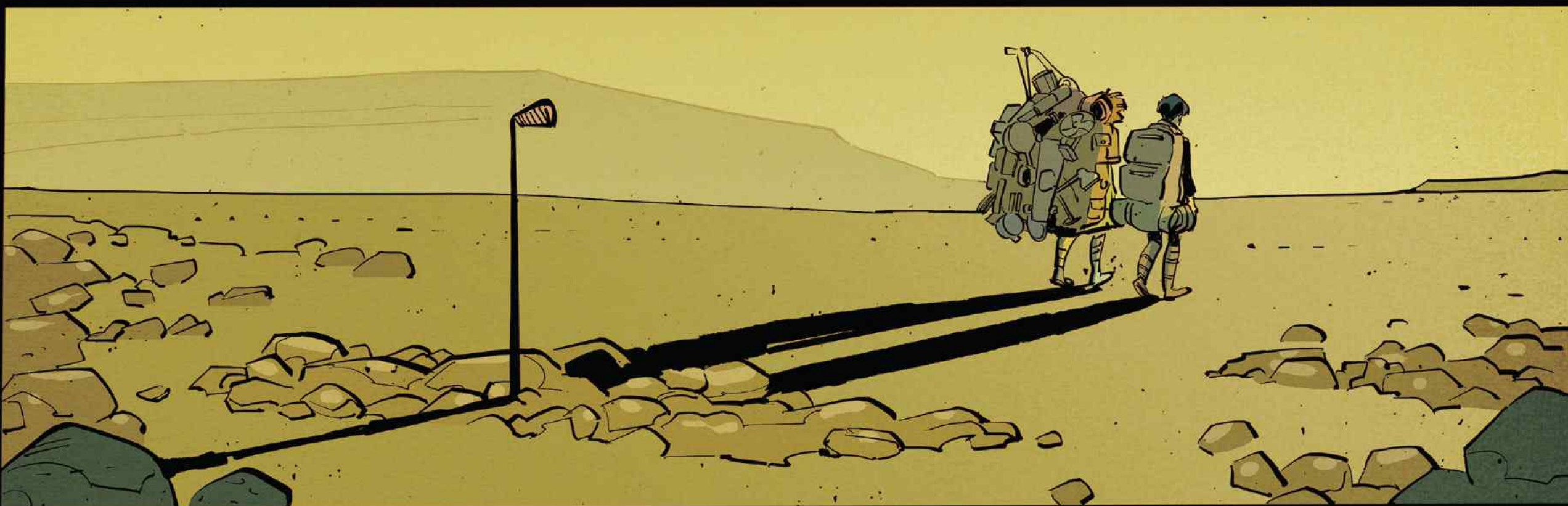












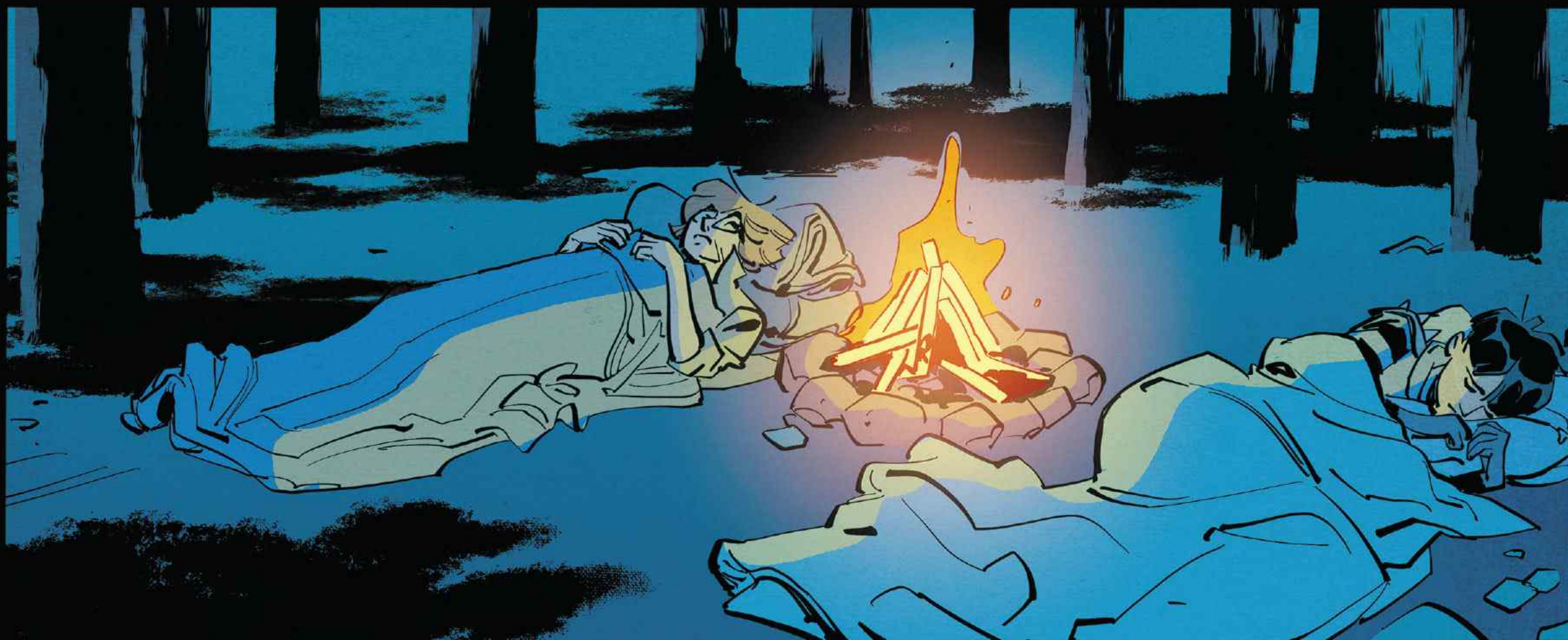
They walked,  
but not the  
same as before.

Now the  
*silence*  
took hold.



And the *world*  
was silent  
with them.





AT MY TOWER...I **BOOMED** LOTS OF SKINNERS AND SWAMPERS. BUT...IT WAS ALWAYS LIKE A...A **GAME**. NOT LIKE...

...LIKE THAT.

ARE YOU OKAY?

I'M FINE.

RIGHT. SURE, I'M SORRY, I'M SURE YOU'RE USED TO IT.

NOT LIKE IT'S THE FIRST TIME YOU'VE EVER HAD TO **KILL** SOMEBODY, RIGHT?

RIGHT. OF COURSE IT ISN'T.

Mezzy's first lie to Maceo.

ARE YOU OKAY, MACEO?

YEAH. I'M GOOD.

Maceo's eighth lie.

Of the day.

TOTALLY... GOOD.

I'M GONNA...GET TO SLEEP.

Ninth.





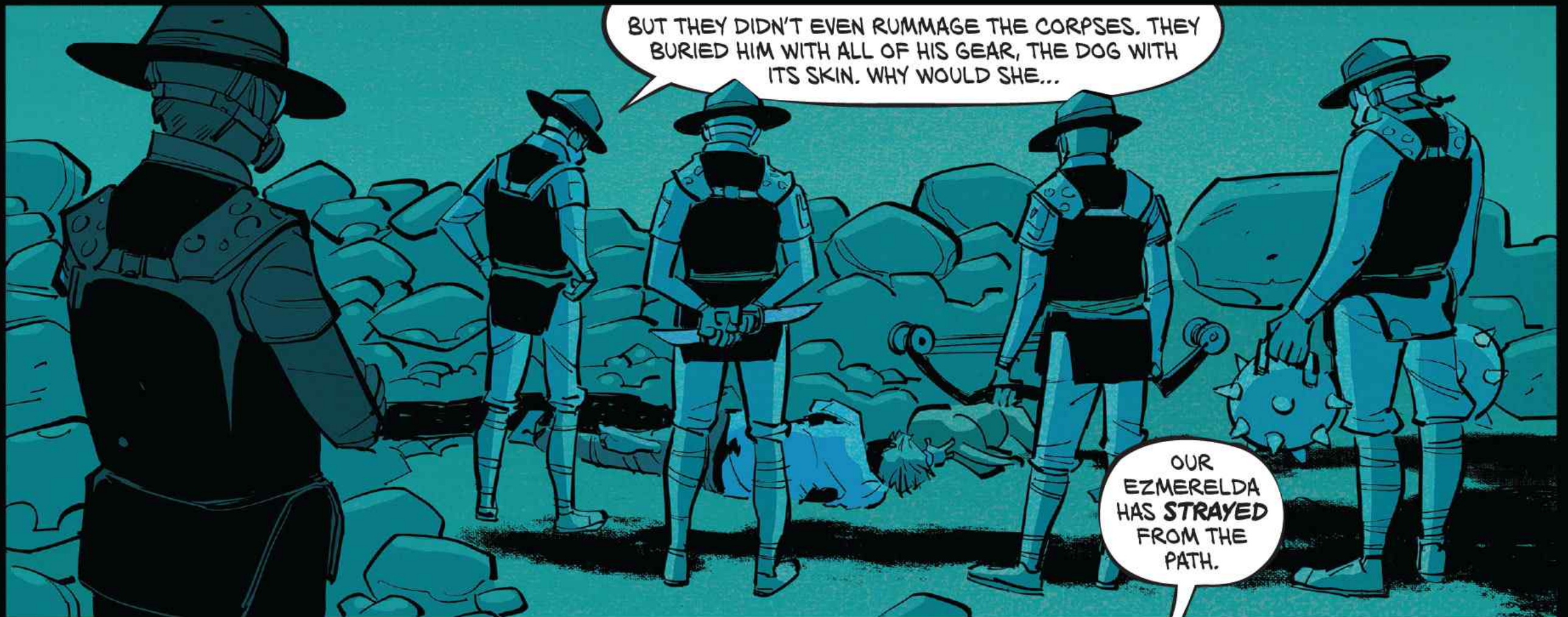
TRACKS  
LEAD HERE.

LOOKS LIKE  
THEY TRIED TO BURY  
SOME EAT-UP  
WASTEWALKER.



WHY WOULD  
SHE **BURY** HIM?  
SHE KNOWS  
WHAT THE BOOK  
SAYS.

LOOK AT THE  
WOUNDS. RATS WERE  
EATING HIM ALIVE.  
SHE PUT THE STUPID  
SCUM OUT OF HIS  
MISERY.



BUT THEY DIDN'T EVEN RUMMAGE THE CORPSES. THEY  
BURIED HIM WITH ALL OF HIS GEAR, THE DOG WITH  
ITS SKIN. WHY WOULD SHE...

OUR  
EZMERELDA  
HAS **STRAYED**  
FROM THE  
PATH.



IT IS NOT FOR  
US TO UNDERSTAND  
THE **WAYS OF THE**  
**STRAYED**, NOW IS IT,  
MY RANGERS?

NO,  
CHIEFTESS  
MAW.



NOW, MORE  
THAN EVER, WE MUST  
WALK THE ONE TRUE  
PATH. WE MUST FOLLOW  
THE PROVERBS OF  
THE FIRST SURVIVORS,  
TO THE BLESSED  
LETTER.

**STRIP THE  
BEASTS.**

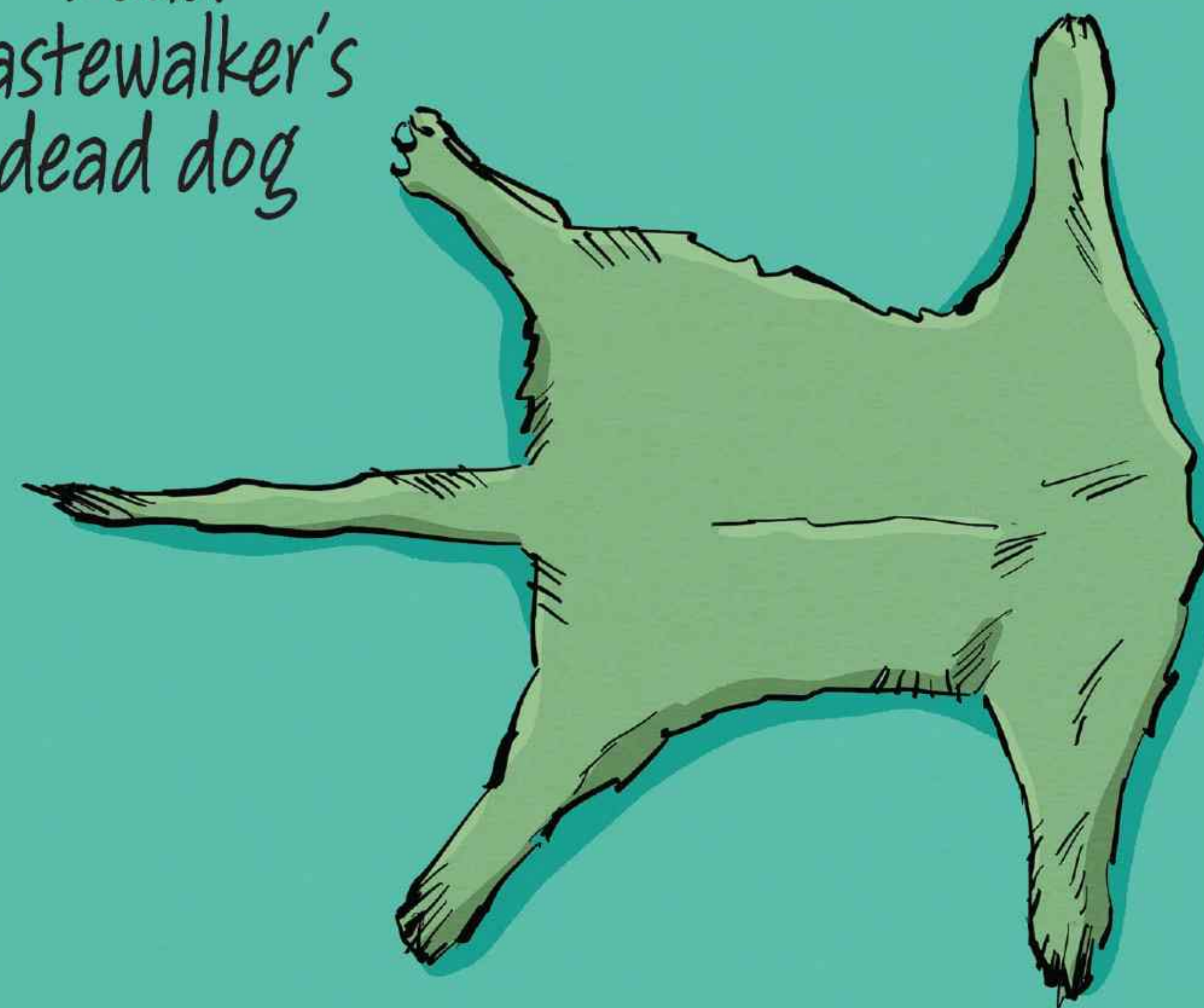




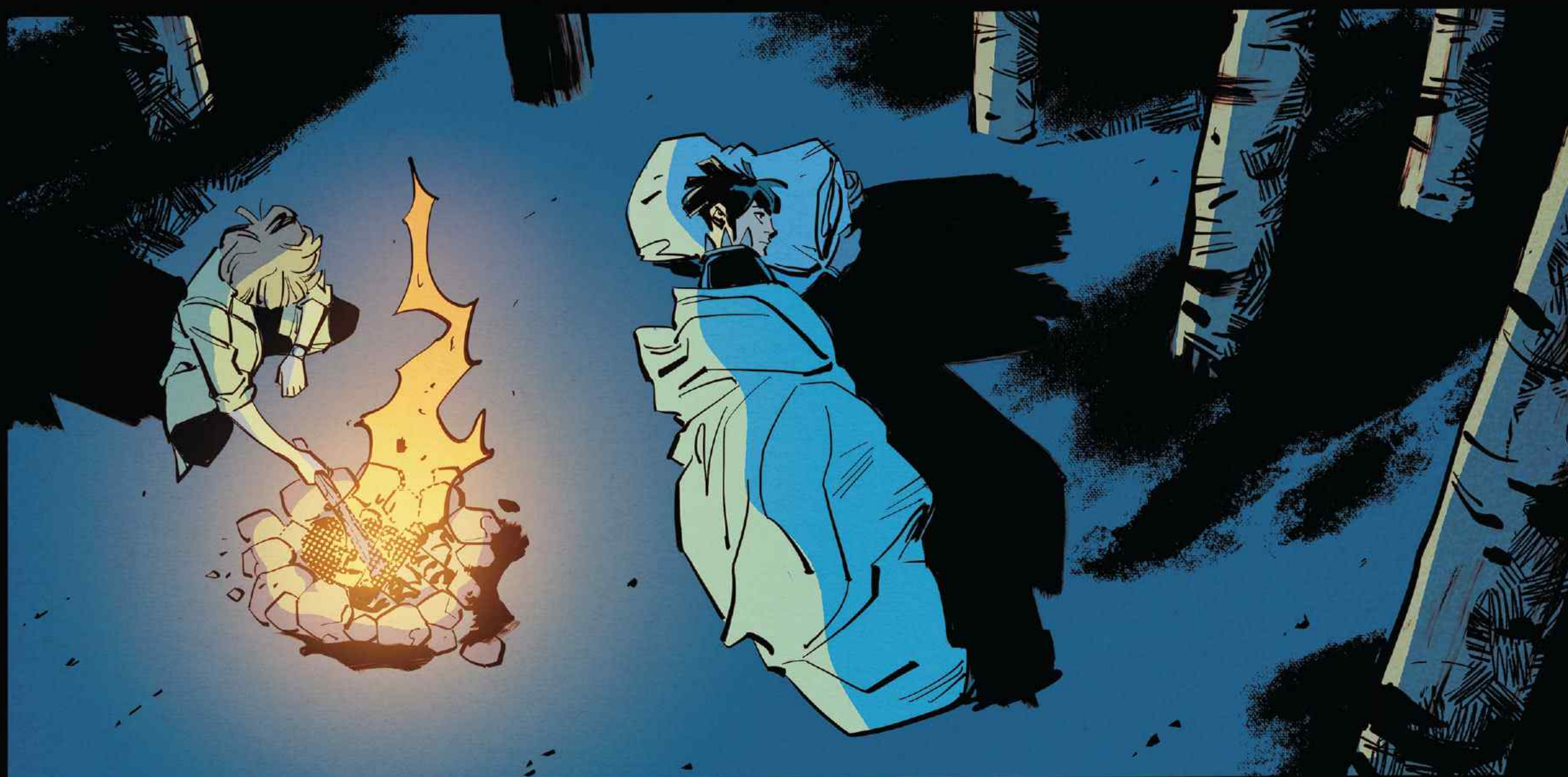
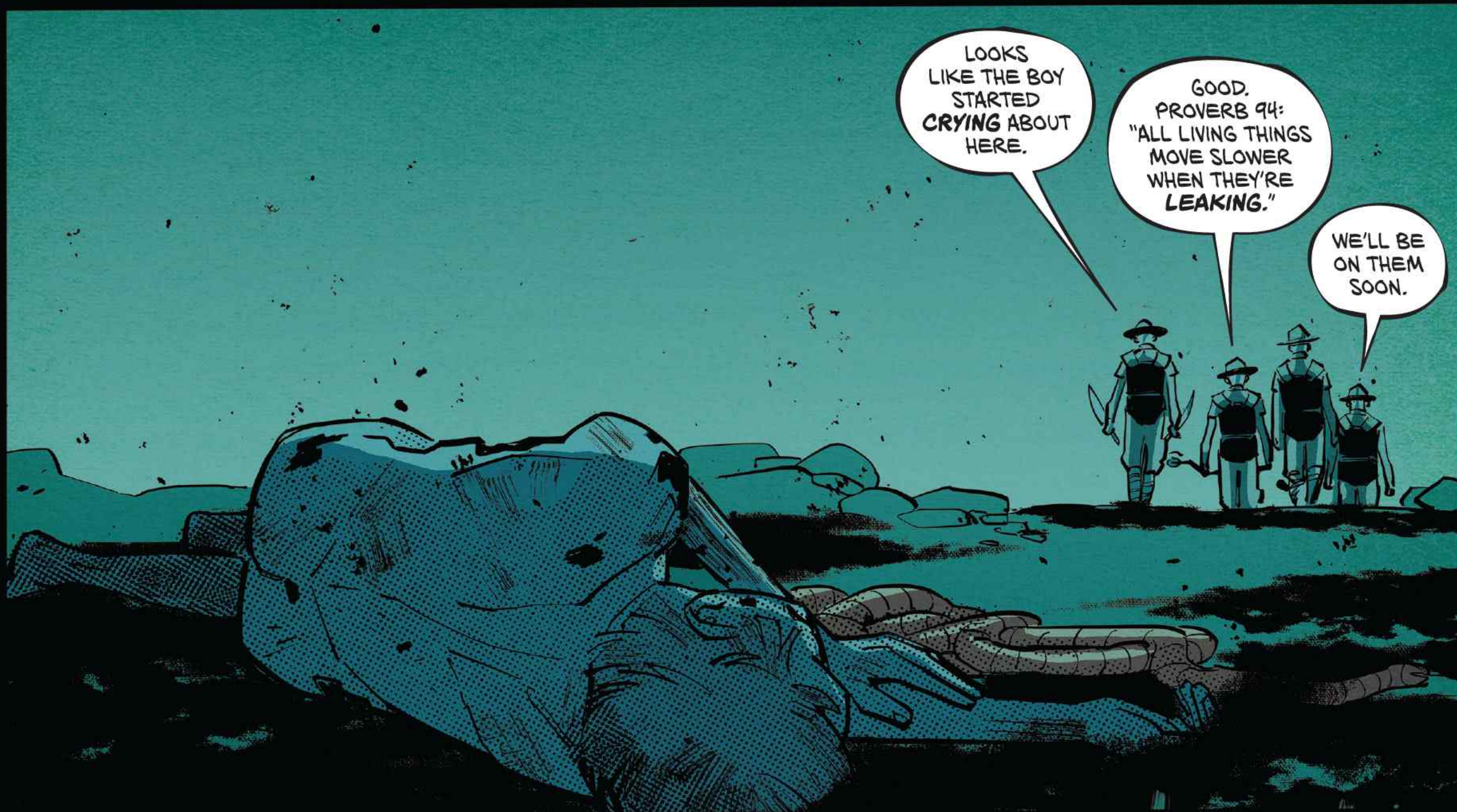
Dead  
wastewalker



Dead  
wastewalker's  
dead dog











"I RECORDED  
THIS WHILE YOU  
WERE SLEEPING."



"YOU CONKED  
RIGHT OUT, AS  
USUAL. I DIDN'T  
SLEEP MUCH  
AT ALL."



"YOU'RE RIGHT,  
I DON'T KNOW  
ANYTHING ABOUT  
SURVIVING. NOT  
THE WAY YOU DO."



"BUT I  
WANT TO  
TRY."

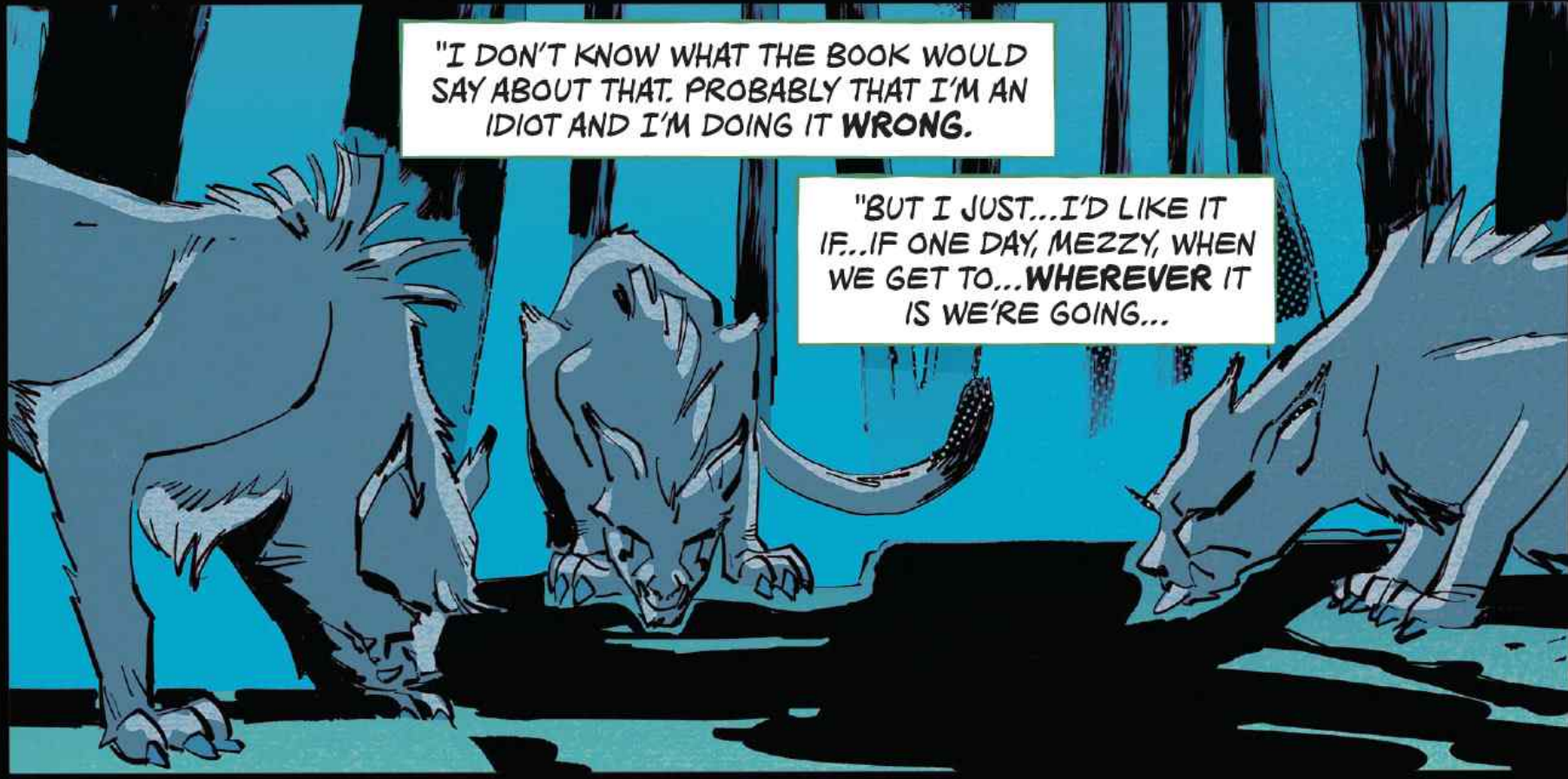


"THAT'S  
WHY I'M  
LEAVING."



A character with a large, complex mechanical backpack is walking through a forest. The backpack has various gears, pipes, and a large circular component. The character is wearing a long coat and has a determined expression.

"FOR A HUNT."

Two werewolves are shown in a forest. One is standing and looking towards the right, while the other is crouching down, possibly sniffing the ground. The scene is dark and atmospheric.

"I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE BOOK WOULD SAY ABOUT THAT. PROBABLY THAT I'M AN IDIOT AND I'M DOING IT **WRONG**."

"BUT I JUST...I'D LIKE IT IF...IF ONE DAY, MEZZY, WHEN WE GET TO...**WHEREVER** IT IS WE'RE GOING..."

A character is peeking out from behind a tree trunk. They are wearing a headlamp and looking towards the left. The scene is dark and mysterious.

"...THAT MAYBE WE COULD WRITE OUR **OWN** BOOK, YOU KNOW?"

A character is holding a large, open book. They are looking at the book with a focused expression. The book has a thick cover and many pages.

"THE ADVENTURER'S ALMANAC..."

"...COLON, THE UNBELIEVABLE BUT TRUE COLLECTED ACUMEN OF WASTELAND **LIVING**..."

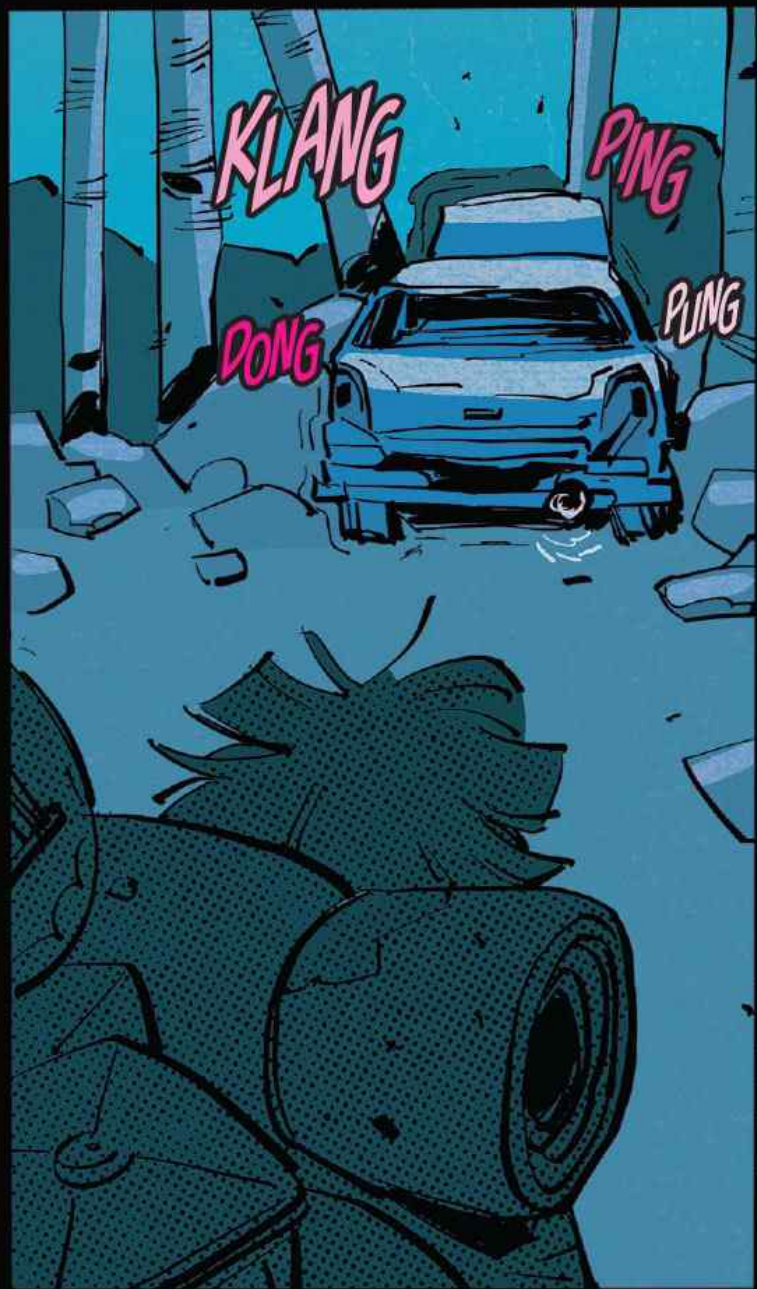
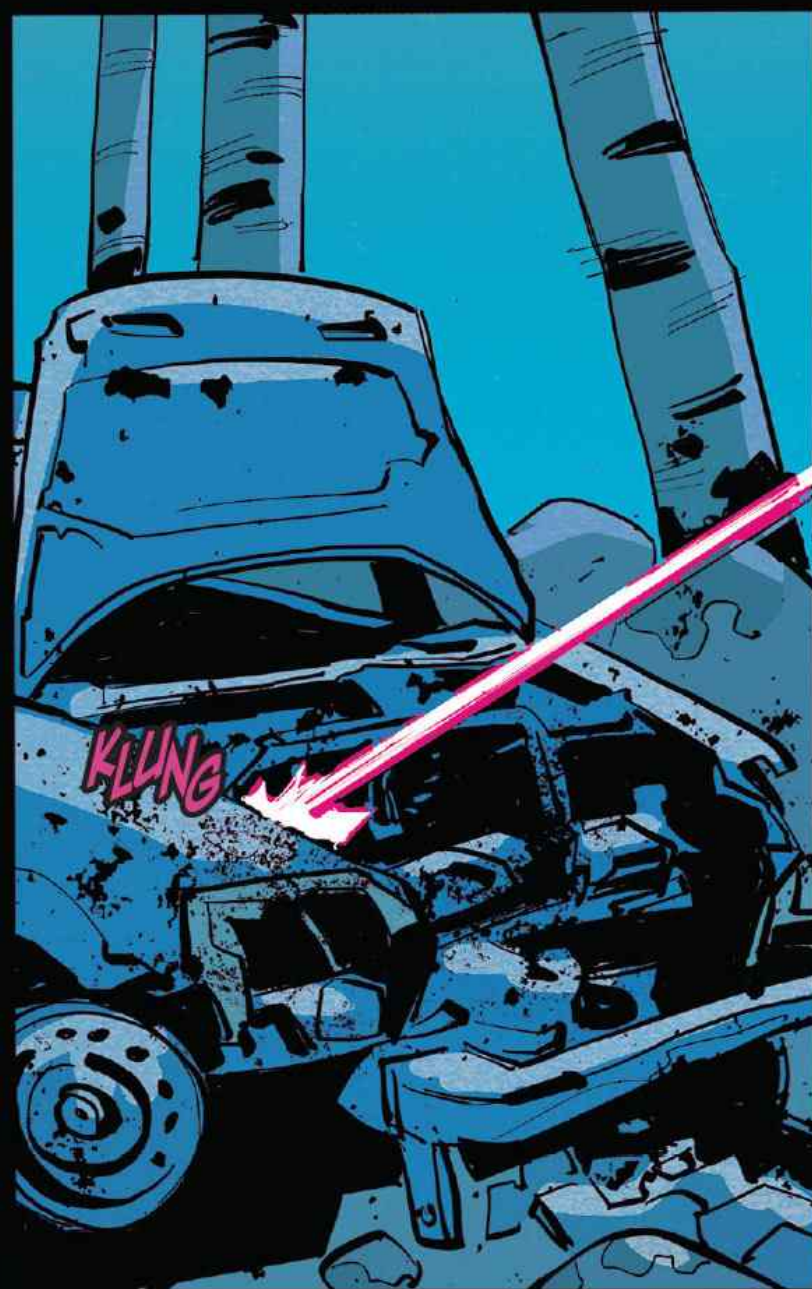
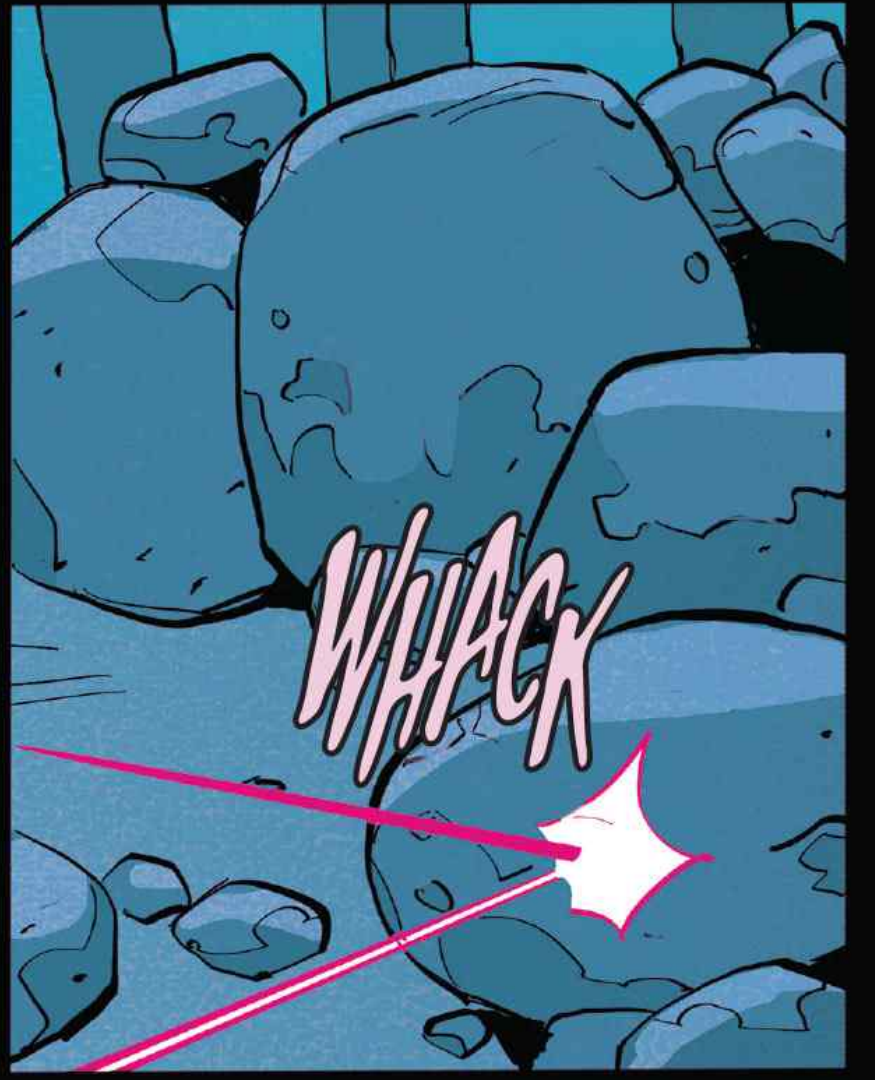
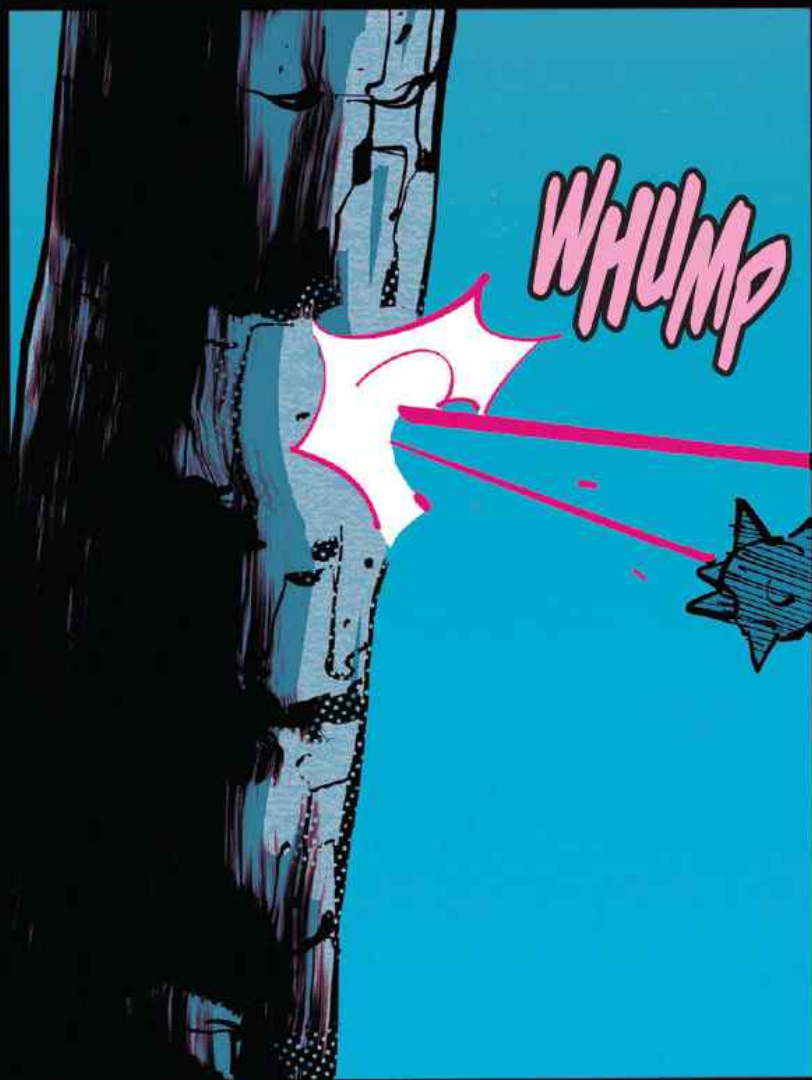
A pair of hands is holding two cassette tapes. One tape is labeled "FOR MEZZY" and the other is labeled "OLD RANGER". The hands are wearing dark gloves.

"...PARENTHESES, A TRAVELOGUE OF THE WORLD'S MOST WONDROUS REMAINING SIGHTS..."

A character is holding a book. They are looking at the book with a focused expression. The book has a thick cover and many pages.

"...AS CATALOGUED FIRSTHAND BY MACEO AND MEZZY."













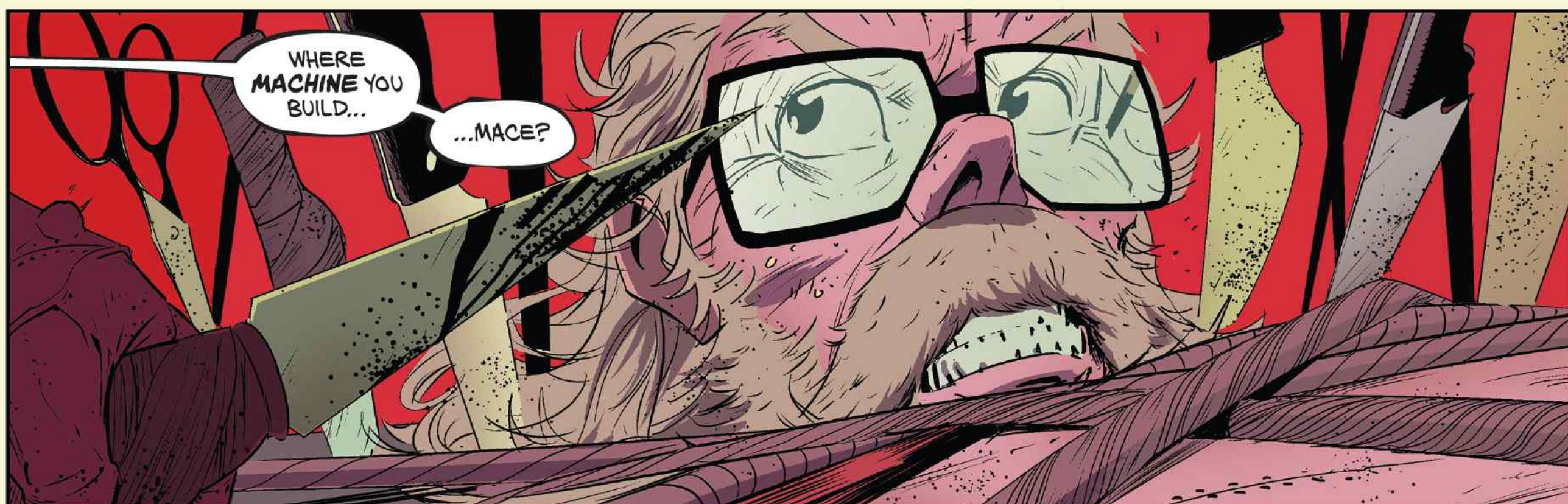
THIS IS  
HIM?

THIS IS  
WHO SHE LEFT  
US FOR?

MEZZY WILL  
REALIZE HOW  
BRAINDEAD  
THAT WAS...

...WHEN WE  
BRING HER  
THIS IDIOT'S  
SKIN.

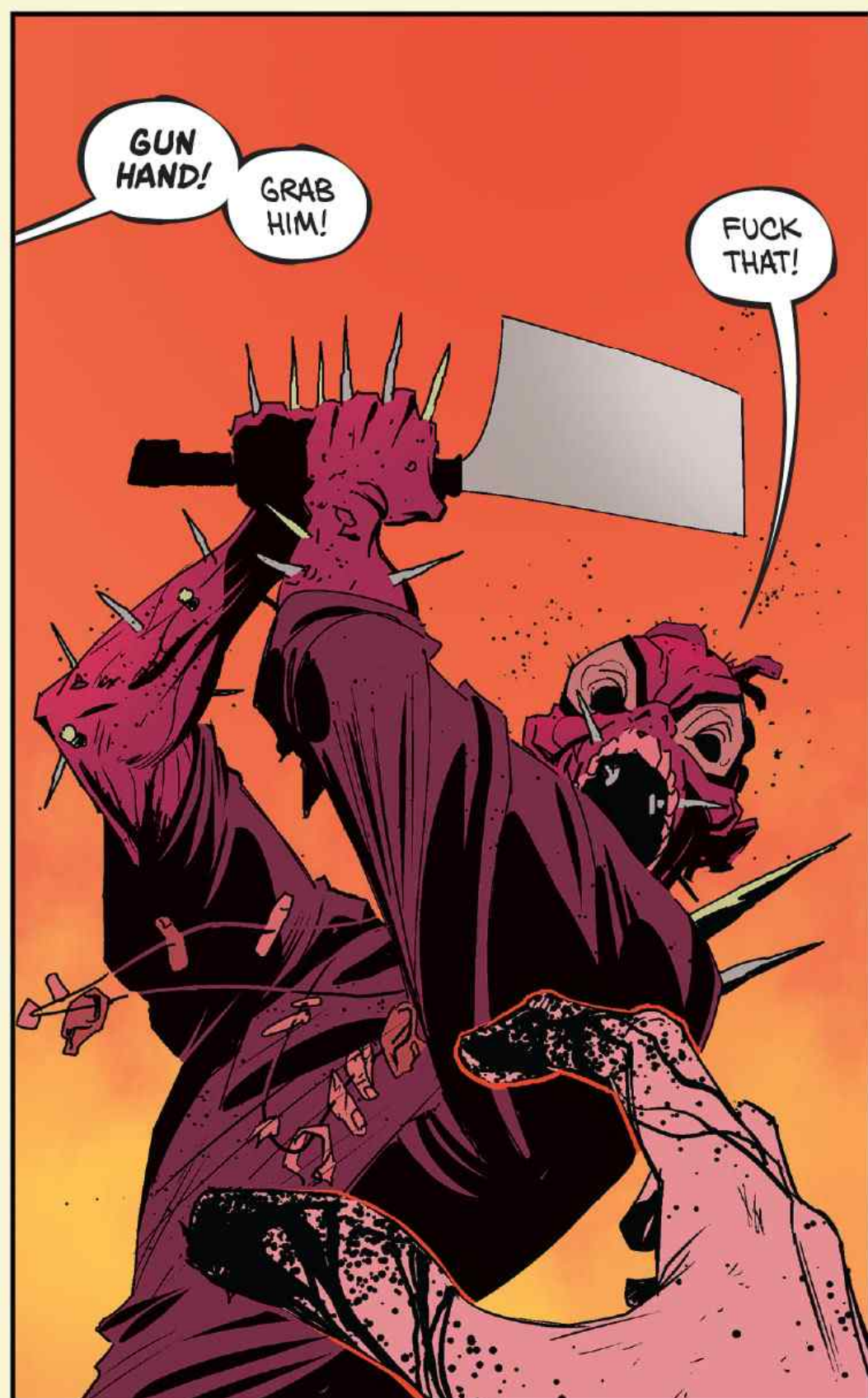








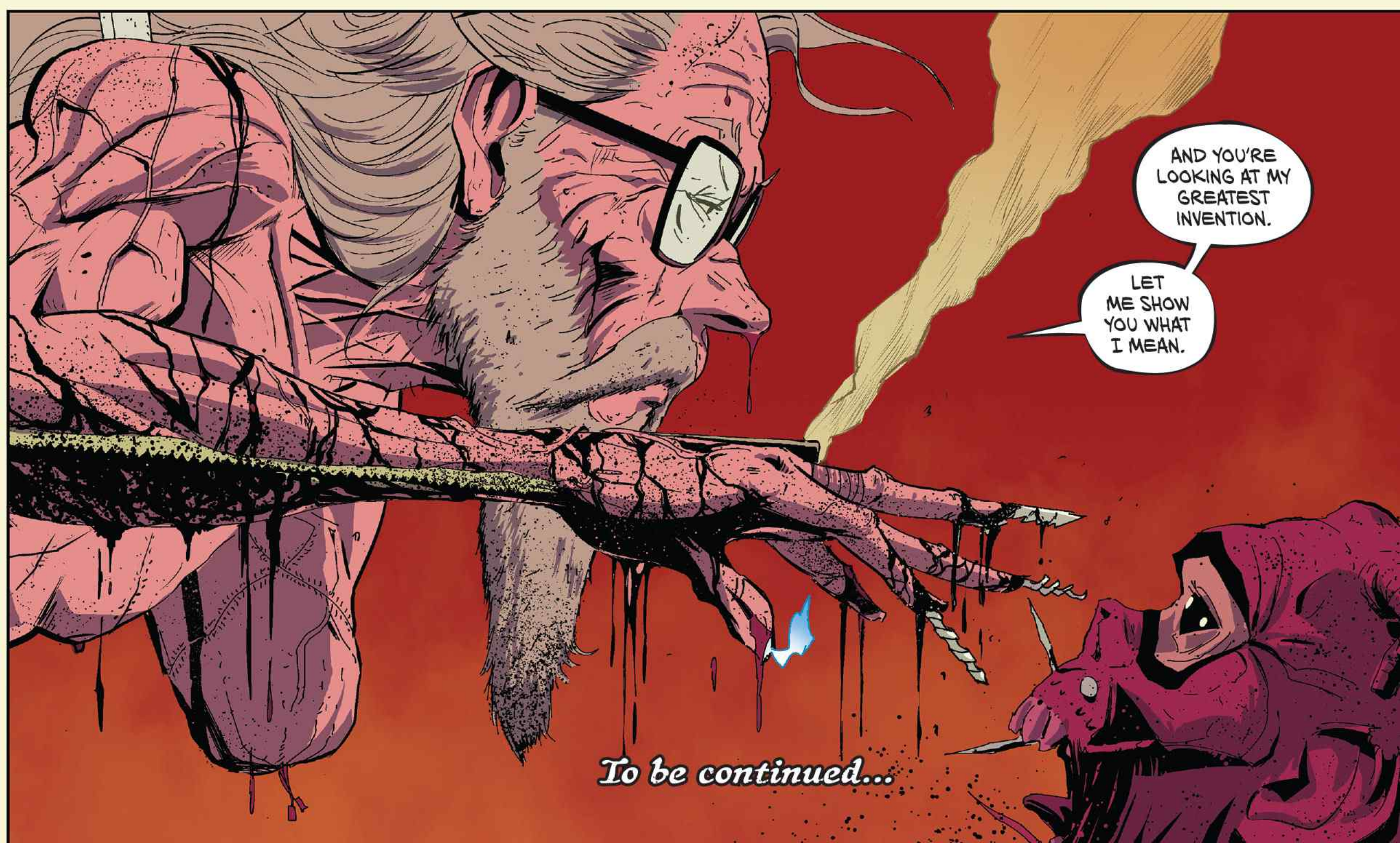














## LETTERS FROM THE BOOM!PEN

Here we are at the beginning of a new year, and it's a particularly special one for me. 2023 marks 15 years since I joined this incredible company.

15 years since I was working on a wobbly card table, surrounded by walled towers of cardboard boxes (more privacy than a cubicle, as it happens). We didn't even have a coffee machine back then, but what we did have was a lot of belief, potential, and fire in the belly.

Since I joined the company back in 2008 I've had a front row seat for one of the great ascensions of a publisher in the modern age of comics. Our readership has continued to grow, the BOOM! community is stronger today than it's ever been, and our retail partners the globe over have had our back time and again.

So a thank you is in order, top of year, to all of you who champion our titles. All of you who ride with us and continue to celebrate phenomenal, groundbreaking work from the best creators in the business. And we're not slowing down. Even though this journey has been filled with some of the most remarkable moments of my career, these past few years in particular have been...well, something special.

In the last 24 months alone, we saw the premiere of our very first TV series (season one of R.L. Stine's *Just Beyond* is available now on Disney+!), an absolutely astounding reaction to our first expansion of the *Something is Killing the Children* universe with *House of Slaughter*, and of course, our partnership with Keanu Reeves on *BRZRKR*, culminating in a history-making Hall H panel at San Diego Comic-Con that I will never forget.

But while it's nice to reminisce about the past, what's really important is what's next. We've never been a team that's been satisfied with the status quo. Through everything the past few years have thrown at the comic book industry, you've believed in us, supported us, and

that drives us more than ever in our pursuit to bring you, our readers, unforgettable stories and experiences. And I know I'm not exactly an unbiased opinion, but taking a peek at the 2023 slate, **I think this is going to be our biggest year yet.**

We have a host of new originals lined up, the final issue of *BRZRKR* on the way, more surprises coming in the *SIKTC* universe, a new *Power Rangers* title I'm very pumped about, and so much more. Expect announcements all year as we unveil our slate and more than a few surprises.

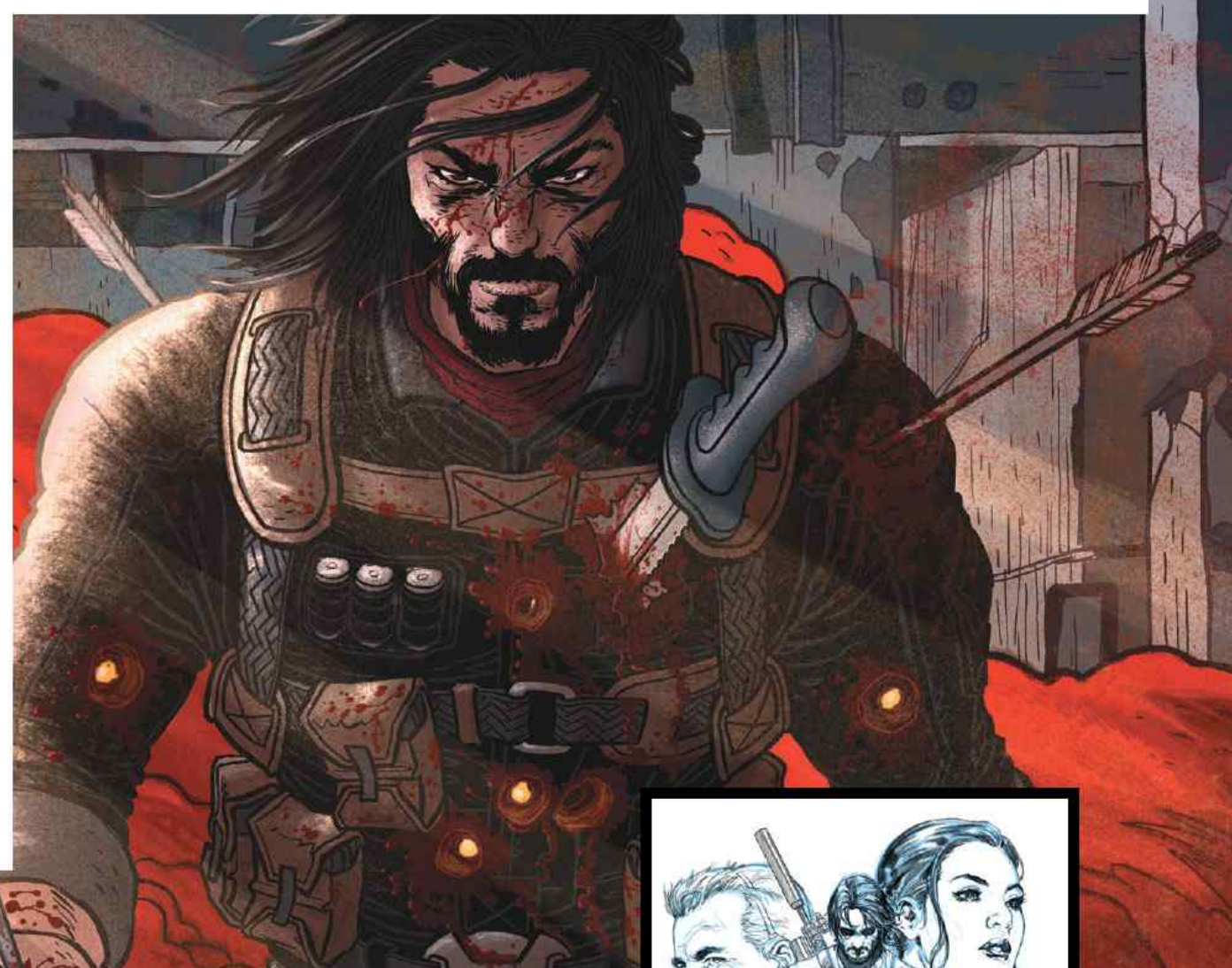
Keep an eye out on this page, as well. We'll be dropping exclusive news, giveaways, discounts, events, and much, much more... coming to you here first. Just one of the ways we'd like to continue to say thank you.

Here's to the next 15 years with the best community in comics!

With Gratitude,



**MATT GAGNON**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, BOOM! STUDIOS



## NEW GIVEAWAY!

THE EPIC CONCLUSION TO THE IMMORTAL SAGA IS NEARLY HERE!

To celebrate the milestone **issue #12** of *BRZRKR*, we're giving away **12 copies** of the **ultra-rare 1:500 variant** of the iconic **first issue!** Rules and restrictions apply.

SCAN THE QR CODE FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN!



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# Thank you!

**MAKING COMIC BOOKS IS A TRULY COLLABORATIVE EFFORT. WE'RE GRATEFUL FOR OUR ENTIRE AMAZING TEAM THAT MADE 2022 OUR BEST YEAR YET, AND ARE PROUD TO RECOGNIZE THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS:**

Adam Yoelin  
Alex Lorenzen  
Allyson Gronowitz  
Amanda Lawson  
Amber Peters  
Armando Elizondo  
Ashley Troub  
Bryce Carlson  
Caitlin Holland  
Caroline Butler  
Cheryl Parker  
Crystal White  
Dafna Pleban  
Diane Payne  
Elizabeth Brei  
Elyse Strandberg  
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Esther Kim  
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Stephanie Lazarski  
Stephen Christy  
Tiffany Thomas  
Veronica Gutierrez







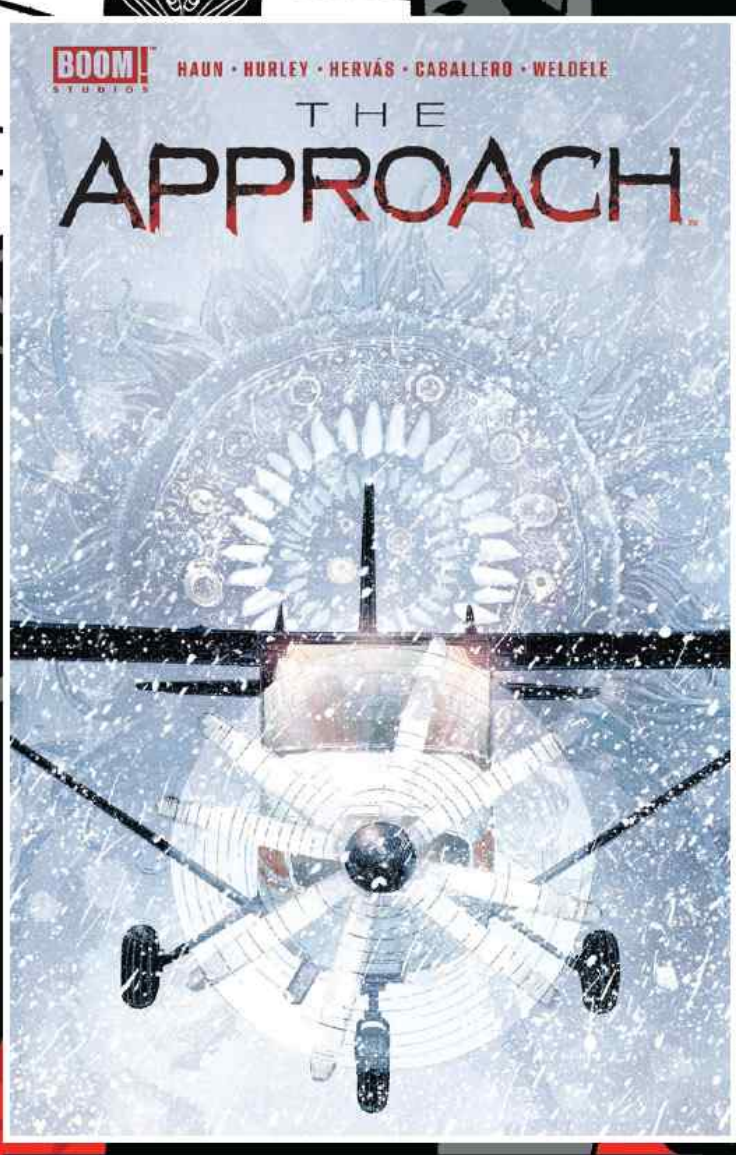
# COMING SOON: YOUR NEW FAVORITE HORROR SERIES

Discover a brand new original horror series from legendary *The Walking Dead* artist **Charlie Adlard** and highly acclaimed writer **Simon Spurrier** (*Hellblazer*, *Coda*).

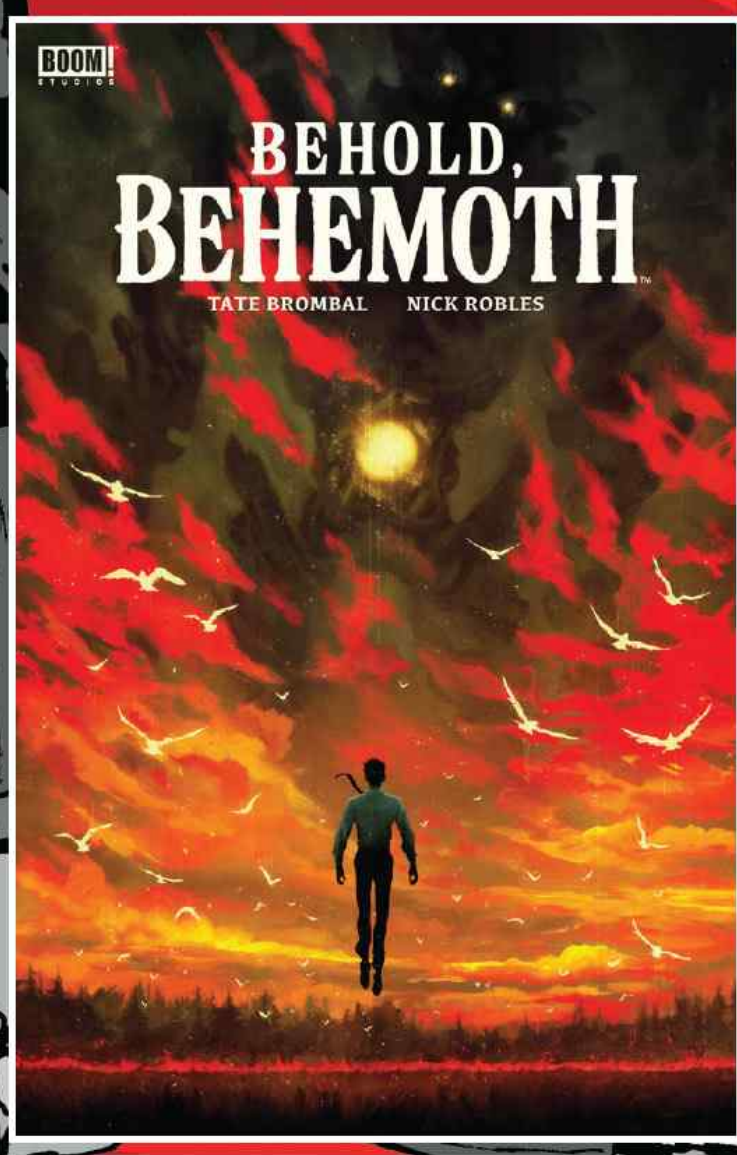
# DAMN THEM ALL

Meet Ellie "Bloody El" Hawthorne: occultist-for-hire. Following the death of Ellie's uncle, an infamous magician and occult detective, the 72 devils of the Ars Goetia are mysteriously freed from their infernal realm. Now it's up to Ellie to track down each of these exiled demons and damn them right back to Hell by any means necessary... holy water, conjuration, or just her trusty, rusty claw hammer.

ON SALE NOW



ON SALE NOW



ON SALE NOW



ON SALE NOW

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